

The Muratorian Fragment: A “Page” of the Biblical Canonic History of the New Testament

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Abstract

The Muratorian Fragment (Canon) or Muratorianum is the oldest known list of the New Testament writings. It was discovered by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in a manuscript in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, Italy, and published by him in 1740. It is called a fragment because the beginning of this first canonical “page” is missing. Although the manuscript in which it appears was copied during the seventh century, the list itself is dated to about 170 because its author refers to the episcopate of Pius I of Rome (died 157). The original author composed it in the Western Church; he identifies himself as a contemporary of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon and Tertullian. He mentions only two epistles of John, without describing them. The Apocalypse of Peter is mentioned as a book which “some of us will not allow to be read in church”. The dating based on the Shepherd of Hermas and the reference to the bishop Pius remains crucial for sustaining the second Christian century. The Fragmentist’s great innovation was to collect the information on the Gospels, the Letters and the other writings that are “received” in the Church of Rome into one list, which that community regarded as closed and coming from the “Catholic Church”. His intention is, in the first place, a concrete and practical material for the cultic lectures in the Church’s workshop.